

The hired helpers

By Olive Anderson

The mistakes of Market Garden

Garden **of the Twentieth Century**
Volume I Balfour to Chamberlain

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[illegible]

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‘Loaden with fruit of fairest
colours mixed’.

**Small though thou art in inches
Thou art large in compass**

**We gape to see Time's wisdom
Ripen on the leafy screen.**

Rich in kinds of Good art thou
Thou art also plentiful in

Silliness, shoddiness, nastiness
Of every manner. They are

Abundant in diverse Good, am

At leisure then lie in thy shade

Increasing knowledge, increases
For the woman plucked the sw

And the man did gaze thereon
Seeing such visions.

Hearing such sounds

Knowing both Good and Evil

Yet their bread they earn
In the sweat of their faces

Five days a week, and on the
Sixth and seventh shall they sit

Beneath the tree of knowledge
Ignorance and stew in its juice

D

D. J. Enright

The myth of the Mahatma

By Eric Stokes

VED MEHTA: Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles 260pp. André Deutsch. £4.50.

The West has always taken its cultural passage to India in the light, swift-moving craft of the novel, the magazine, and the various forms of higher journalism, while the cumbersome galleries conveying the heavier cargoes of academic learning have attracted few masters or passengers. Hence the importance of that attaches to writing which in other circumstances would often be dismissed as ephemera. Up to the middle of the present century the traffic remained almost exclusively in European hands. The West formed its variegated image of India from a line of writers that started with Abbé Dubois and ran, among others, through Hebel, Jacquemont, Emily Eden, Fanny Parkes, W. H. Russell (of *The Times*), G. O. Trevelyan, Flora Annie Steel, on to Kathleen Mayo, Beverley Nichols, and Eric Newby. It was this minor and obscure tradition, the literary heaven that produced in Kipling and Forester two stars of the first magnitude, whose power helped to fix India in Western consciousness.

This tradition of writing has now come to an end. Paul Scott, J. G. Farrell, and even G. M. ("Flashman") Fraser may continue to suck the last exotic sweetness of the Indian melon, but the Westerner has lost the settled gaze and assurance that came from long residence and imperial commitment. He is reduced to a cultural tourist whose own explorations of the Indian mind are limited to the instant reports of the television camera. For the written word he is dependent on writers who can still claim the carnality of inside knowledge, to a group which in language, unexpected sense, fulfills the function of the class of cultural intermediaries. "India in colour and blood, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect," Macaulay should have added "English in aesthetic feeling for language." For while his other cultural witnesses look much too crude and question-begging in the remarkable command of style which gives this new class of Indians writing in English much of its special authority. In a society whose everyday culture is largely pre-literate and oral the speaker and conversationalist form the writer. Pured of the shapeliness and loquacity of verbal discourse, Indian writing is capable of producing a suddenly nervous and racy English prose that recaptures the immediacy and sprightliness of speech.

Ved Mehta has inherited this inner ear for English diction common to R. K. Narayan, V. S. Naipaul, Rumi Jhabvala, Kamila Markandaya, Niyad Chaudhuri, Dom Moraes, and Klaus Knauber. Because of his Indian nationalism, sensitive to the reflected image the group receives far more attention in India than abroad, an attention curiously compounded of adulation and execration. Even in 1959, as a young author of twenty-five, Ved Mehta was granted an audience by the President and lunch on the family with Nehru and his daughter. What he, therefore, writes of Gandhi demonstrates more powerfully than the lightness of his composition would suggest. His latest book, already published much pre-publication, is a collection of essays, in the form of a diary, that he has followed in the footsteps of the Anglo-Indian journalists who have been suitably afflicted with images of the self-effacing Gandhi taking sixteen-year-old girls to his bed to test his capacity to resist unchaste thoughts, or of the Mahatma marching through the villages of Noakhali at the head of his little team of porters who bore his comrade, the bucket, his enemy syringe and the other impediments of his obsession with defecation. Yet the overt intention of *Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles* is directed to winning more than a cheap triumph in the West or a *succès de scandale* in the East.

As avowed in the preface, it is an effort to "demystify Gandhi," since it is the myths woven round him by his apostles that in Mehta's opinion have distorted the true message of the master.

In fact, the very core of Gandhi's thought, presented and developed in tens of thousands of his writings and speeches—his search for God through celibacy and cleanliness, through mastery of self, human needs and functions, mental and bodily—has been obscured by mythologizers fearful of debasing and sensationalizing their martyred hero.

The stakes are high. With Gandhi still central to the modern Indian psyche "the use of the facts and myths of Gandhi's life may help to determine the future not only of India but of numerous countries that have either a stake in India's well-being or in Gandhi's thought." Half of the book consists of a simple biographical account drawn from the obvious published sources. The other records interviews with surviving followers and visits to the official centres of the Gandhian cult. It is this portion of the book which comes alive. The moral is implicit. His followers have grown superstitious. It is the lack of the Gandhian spirit, the lack of the special, the history that India Gandhi's name should fortuitously coincide with the Mahatma's, since under her rule there occurred the final apotheosis of the master and the total rejection of his teaching.

It is in defining the quiescence of the teacher that Mehta's methods and conclusions are most open to question. The Gandhi that he restores after removing the layers of accumulated myth is the Gandhi of the Sevagram Ashram, founded in 1936 when Gandhi was in his second year and his main political career behind him. The consuming purpose of his life had apparently narrowed to the double quest for personal holiness and the "constructive programme" of village uplift. The struggle for Indian independence was relegated increasingly to a side issue. Such an image inevitably results from relying on the fast vanishing oral tradition whose sharpest memory of Gandhi in the last decade of his life. Even then the seemingly objective technique of the interview conceals not only the hand of art but a powerful fiction. For so important is the visual image to Western comprehension that Mehta loads his accounts of persons and places with minute and loving detail. The decay that has fallen on the centres of Gandhian activity, the sadness of lost causes and the nameless that attend human effort, all these are cleverly conveyed by delicate descriptive touches. The technique seems entirely appropriate until we recall with a start that Ved Mehta has been blind since the age of three.

More serious is the author's assumption of detached objectivity, unaware that while busy destroying old myths he is silently weaving a new one of his own. Mehta's interpretation depends on the leading role played in Gandhi's thought by his concern with the control and social expression of the two bodily functions of excretion—sex and excretion. It was about a month after Gandhi's self-dedication as a Brahmachari and his renunciation of further sexual congress with his wife that there came to him spontaneously the conception of *satyagraha*—truth-force or soul-force. Similarly in the Gandhian logic it was from the Indian aversion to human excrement as ritually defiling that there had followed, as a chain of consequences, the untouchability of the sweepers, the untouchability, lack of proper sanitation, endemic disease, debility, emaciation and the converse Indian propensity to spasms of uncontrolled violence. For this subtle obsession with sex and defecation Mehta cleverly advances current Freudian explanations. The frustration of the sexual impulse is widely ascribed to the guilt complex produced by his days in the brief interval when Gandhi had stolen away from the sickroom to enjoy the embraces of his pregnant wife. The frustration of the normal physical satisfaction in excretion was caused by life-long constipation. On these two, according to Mehta, hung all the law and the prophetic. Unconsciously there is a certain plausibility in the explanation; and it makes good New Yorker copy.

Yet Mehta never seriously pauses to consider how far he is transposing into Gandhi's mind the subliminal shock that he and other "outsiders" constantly encounter in their experience of India. As with so many observers, the supposedly objective account of the Indian scene resolves itself into a study of the writer's own psyche under conditions of sudden disorientation. Mehta left India when he was fifteen and has lived subsequently in Britain and America. His reaction is more complex than that of someone who has never known the reek of a society in which men and women still live close to domestic animals and in which the smell of manure, fresh or burned as cooking fuel, pervades everything.

For in any event there is no simple contrast between East and West, tradition and modernity. India confounds and bewilders because it remains a land where different orders of civilization and material culture have not displaced one another successively but continue to live side by side. Hence it remains a country which at the level of an industrial society has accepted and practises public hygiene as a moral norm but which tolerates casual defecation to an extent that turned India for V. S. Naipaul (whom Mehta quotes approvingly) into "an area of darkness." Conversely, while moving at one level towards the modern isolated nuclear family, India remains unable to accept the tolerance towards casual sexual relations that characterizes the West precisely because the sexual act remains the principal means of economic and moral security.

Mehta contends that after having spent twenty-three years of his life in Britain and South Africa Gandhi "saw Indian filth with the eyes of a foreigner." That is as true as to say that he wanted to introduce the social values of industrial society while keeping out industrialism, a rather far-fetched argument. There can be no doubt that residence abroad impressed on Gandhi a conviction of the fallen nature of his people, but the only values he imported from outside Indian tradition were the Western pacifist and theosophical strains in Western thought. Mehta seems unaware how far he is trying to recast Gandhi's life and work in the light of modern American hygiene.

The ultimate distortion in Mehta's picture of the Mahatma is not that it gives undue emphasis to sex and faeces but that it allows almost no place for the politician. It is easy enough to suggest that politics steadily meant less and less to him in his later years, but it does not dispose of the ambiguity in his character or determine his governing passion. Mehta sides off the politician to produce a consistent image of the holy man. Just as a review of Gandhi's life and work by a scholar like Judith Brown keeps carefully to the political

realm. But there are those who see the rhythm of his life determined by the upswings and downswings of agitational politics.

When momentarily he ceased to be able to dominate the Indian political scene he would retire to the ashram to recruit his strength and act from the wings. But he never for a moment withdrew from politics. He constantly hungered for publicity despite his ritual weekly day of silence. In that sense he lived and flourished in the public realm and sought to perfect his unique instrument of "people power". He was never able to renounce that love of fame which runs wider and deeper than



"Bellringers", an ink-on-paper painting showing traces of the Coptic, Chinese-influenced style attributed to the Istanbul Albanian, Muhammad Syah Qalem (Black Pen), a shadowy figure from the 15th or 16th century. It is from a magnificent facsimile of work assigned to or associated with Qalem's name—the S. Ispiroglu's Syah Qalem (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck-Verlagsanstalt, Sch. 1976).

Schools for the natives

By A. J. Stockwell

REX STEVENSON: Cultivators and Administrators British Educational Policy towards the Malays 1875-1906 240pp. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. £11.75.

The Oxford University Press have recently brought out two monographs on the education policy in Malaysia: the first was *Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaysia 1874-1940* by Philip Loh Fook Seng. Like Rex Stevenson's *Cultivators and Administrators*, it deals with the four Federated Malay States—Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. Philip Loh, an educationist, is concerned with the ways in which colonial educational policies served to emphasize the divisions between the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Stevenson, a historian, examines the Malay community and over a shorter period. He shows how the schemes introduced by the British perpetuated the gulf between the raja and rakyat (people) of traditional society. On the one hand the Malay community was anxious to reconcile the Malay royalty and nobility to the new regime and were prepared

to offer them English education and places in the administration. On the other hand they were opposed to the indiscriminate teaching of English and, being contemptuous of "upstart Asiatics", confined the villagers to vernacular schools which were set up despite local indifference and suspicion.

Character-forming was the justification of both systems: the peasant was to learn "habits of industry, punctuality and obedience"; the raja was to acquire the manners of a gentleman. Each was to know his place but neither gained much practical knowledge. The opinions of Sir Frank Swettenham (pioneer Resident, Resident General and finally Governor-High Commissioner) gave definition to educational policy for most of this period, and I enjoyed the chapter in Stevenson's book where his ideas are discussed. Swettenham emerges from his official and private writings as an exponent of two principles of education: social conservatism and moral reform. Though there was no major debate on the subject, as had occurred in India, the Malay school system was a British administrator and a Malay ruler. During the brief time as Resident Inspector he attempted to reform the Malay school system by giving the syllabus a literary content and making it an instrument for the

revival of Malay culture. At the same time he tried to ensure teaching in English at the Malay College, Kuala Lumpur, would be available to meritorious Malays of all classes. After all, however, the scope of his influence in the vernacular schools was limited to the three R's and basic literacy. The Malay College became the preserve of the traditional elite.

Political and administrative expediency is not, Stevenson claims, the full explanation of British policy towards the Malays. The administrators clearly identified Victorian social and class values with the Malay community. In shaping his policy, Stevenson was aware of the "Victorian cosmology" where some of the ingrained ideas were told, was readily applied to the Malay community. This is an attractive view popular in the Malay school system for giving the syllabus a literary content and making it an instrument for the

The saint of nationalism

By Ainslie Embree

JUDITH M. BROWN: Gandhi and Civil Disobedience The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-34 414pp. Cambridge University Press. £15.50.

"I am biding my time", Gandhi wrote in May 1928, "and you will find me leading the country in the field of politics when the country is ready. I have no false modesty about me." Then there is a sudden shift in tone: his time might never come, he might never fulfil his dream. And then another shift: "We are all in the hands of God. I shall therefore await His guidance." Judith M. Brown in one of the latest—and one of the most important—additions to the vast Gandhi bibliography professes to be baffled by someone whose religious commitment was undoubted and yet who, as she puts it, "creaked in the doubtful currency of politics". Jimmy Carter would have had to creak to regain the leadership of the Congress in 1928 at the meetings in Calcutta when he persuaded a divided membership to accept the more radical sections with the resolution that agreed a disobedience campaign to regain the leadership of the Congress. Gandhi's status was not granted by the end of 1929. When the time ran out, Gandhi was ready with one of the most dramatic gestures of his career, the Great Salt March from Ahmedabad to Dandi. His imprisonment was followed by the most civil disobedience campaign of 1930-31.

As Gandhi knew very well, even if Nehru and the others did not, politics of confrontation which stop short of a call to revolution cannot sustain themselves for very long, and by mid-1931 Gandhi was moving towards negotiations with the government. The resulting settlement was as ambiguous as the civil disobedience campaign had been. The story of Gandhi's dealings with the Round Table Conference has often been told, but Brown's analysis, based on fresh look at the sources, puts the affair in proper perspective as not so much an opportunity that was lost but as one that was not taken seriously. One can question her judgment, however, that it was Gandhi's "problem" that could be solved through negotiation with the Congress. Because her focus is on Gandhi and the Congress, she tends to underplay the significance of the Muslim position at this period.

Gandhi's consent to start a new civil disobedience campaign in 1932 was reluctantly given, for as an expert in *satyagraha*, as he called himself, he knew that the severity of the response of the government, combined with the weakness of the Congress, would make it unsuccessful. It ended as previous campaigns had, with Gandhi calling it off against the protests of Nehru and the other activists. It was at this point in 1934 that Gandhi, recognizing what Brown calls "the dilemma of leadership", the problem of reconciling his intense personal commitment to *satyagraha* with the demands of constitutional politics, decided to retire from the Congress. He gave his assurance, however, that he would be available for advice and guidance whenever necessary. Brown concludes that Gandhi's personal dilemma was solved, for while he retained intact his conviction that *satyagraha* properly used by a people adequately prepared for it, was the only solution for the social and moral renewal of India, the Congress once more became a legal institution with its members free to pursue the renewal of constitutional politics in the provincial legislatures.

Academic historians sometimes profess to scorn the use of history for understanding the present, but there are few books that will be more serviceable in providing clues to the meaning of current politics than this. Judith Brown's study of politics in the 1930s, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, like all good histories, enlightens the present as well as the past.

In 1927 Lord Irwin concluded that Gandhi was the "most important figure in Indian politics" that was "moving in a far-reaching sphere divorced from the political facts of the situation". In the following year Gandhi reasserted his authority as the leader of Indian nationalism and went on during the next five years to achieve what Brown includes in the nucleus of his fame and power. Then, in 1934, when he had achieved his greatest triumphs as a negotiator and broker, he decided that he must retire from the Congress as its members were paying only hypocritical lip-service to the ideal of non-violence. K. M. Munshi, the Gujarati writer and Congressman, summed up the problem succinctly when he noted at the time that as individuals most leaders of the Congress knew that civil disobedience and the boycott of the legislatures were futile and impractical gestures, but that "when we meet together to consider these points collectively, Mahatma is on the brain of all of us".

Perhaps any assessment of Gandhi's role in the Indian nationalist movement comes down to this: he was on the brain of them all, the Congressmen, the Muslims, the British. His problem was to find the means to transmute this fascination and respect into the instrumentalities of political power. His opportunity to regain the leadership of the Congress came in 1928 at the meetings in Calcutta when he persuaded a divided membership to accept the more radical sections with the resolution that agreed a disobedience campaign to regain the leadership of the Congress. Gandhi's status was not granted by the end of 1929. When the time ran out, Gandhi was ready with one of the most dramatic gestures of his career, the Great Salt March from Ahmedabad to Dandi. His imprisonment was followed by the most civil disobedience campaign of 1930-31.

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David Hughes, Times

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Secker & Warburg

Palace life in old Palermo

TLS Commentary

South Bank-ruptcy

By Tim Hilton

The idea of an annual show of the strength of current British art is quite new. In 1971 the Arts Council initiated the "Art Spectrum" exhibitions which were held in a number of provincial centres and were organized by the new Regional Art Associations. In the following year Anne Seymour put on "The New Art" at the Hayward. This was devoted to conceptual art. Then there was a gap before Andrew Forge produced "Aspects of English Painting". His idea was to invite twenty-four artists known to him each to invite ten more artists known to them. Lacking any critical comment, the show was, predictably, a failure. Then there was another gap; and now this year's Hayward Annual has been chosen by Michael Compton, Howard Hodgkin and William Turnbull. They have failed too.

Both tasteless (in a proper meaning of the word) and hopeless (for what good young artist could look at this collection without feeling dispirited, or outraged?), the present show apportions a room each to about fifteen artists. That gives them about the equivalent of an exhibition in a commercial gallery. Many of them, in fact, have looked better recently in dealers' shows, and hardly anyone seems to have made work specifically for this exhibition.

Much is familiar. Anthony Hill and Howard Hodgkin have paintings that were in the last John Moores exhibition; Victor Burgin's contribution has been published in book form as well as previously exhibited; Stephen Buckley's paintings have been seen before; Barry Flanagan, whose retrospective opened in Bristol this week, has provided a duplicative mini-retrospective; both Peter Blake's and Roy Lichtenstein's recent shows at Waddington and the Marlboroughs; and Blake's most ambitious-looking painting (which is of fairies) was seen last year in—perhaps its natural home—the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.

That painting is unfinished, as are most of his contributions to the Hayward. (Kitaj and David Hockney too have sent unfinished work.) Michael Compton, for the selectors, speaks of work made "in the previous two or three years". Two of Blake's pictures were begun fifteen years ago. They indicate that at least they are trying to paint like Lenny Rivers, but they could not. Could English whimsy be easier than American? But the fair paintings are not completed either. So Blake has installed little boy trees, in pots, and has hung along one wall two fancy dress outfits he has bought for his wife over the years.

Blake has appeared recently (in *Artscribe*, February 1977) as one of

the members of a "School of London" of figurative painters. It's an idea thought up—more than discarded—by the voracious American expatriate Ron Kitaj who, with David Hockney, another member of this putative "school", has a special place at the Hayward. Kitaj looks more scattered now than he did at the Marlborough in April, but taking the shows together one can make a general point about his recent work, which in an odd way is improving. What has always been wrong with Kitaj's art is its vaunted intellectualism—which in painting means a programmatic literariness and its shallow pictorial culture, its ugly mismanagements, crude drawing, arbitrary colour, faked unity and *je m'en foutisme* whenever a problem turns up. At the same time his pictures have never looked much like anyone else's and could therefore be thought individual, therefore special, therefore laudable. Now, Kitaj is becoming a pasticheur. (One debt of this sort he proudly acknowledges. He has repainted a section of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Sienese government fresco.) And the academizing that is inherent in pastiche has felled his paintings together a little more successfully.

What have we come to, that I should be forced to commend an artist for turning to academic pastiche in part of a major avant-garde exhibition? It would hardly be worth considering if it was not so publicly there in the Hayward. But there is worse yet. There is David Hockney. Alas, he has never looked so unconvincing. His popular public career, from *Wunderkind* to *Poor Man*, has apparently concealed from the selection how totally his painting has declined.

Of course, he has stopped painting for quite long periods, and at these times it has looked as if his thin, pert, amiable graphic sensibility would sustain him. But now he has shown that away, too. He has made a portfolio of etchings illustrating Wallace Stevens's *The Blue Guitar*. They are house illustrations, in a direct way, of Picasso. The etchings are littered with Picasso drawings, schematized from the Durrant beach scenes of 1928, the *Volador Suite* and the 1932 sheet of figures known as "An Answer to Picasso". This gives him away. For Hockney's standard graphic manner is the *faux-naïf*, which is both anti-academic and anti-avant-garde, paring at first sight of both, but with its real existence therefore in a stylistic limbo in which nothing can be gained, for all its adroit knowledging; and to apply this manner to Picasso's great icons means instant failure.

This depressing exhibition provides a full representation of the Hayward. (Kitaj and David Hockney too have sent unfinished work.) Michael Compton, for the selectors, speaks of work made "in the previous two or three years". Two of Blake's pictures were begun fifteen years ago. They indicate that at least they are trying to paint like Lenny Rivers, but they could not. Could English whimsy be easier than American? But the fair paintings are not completed either. So Blake has installed little boy trees, in pots, and has hung along one wall two fancy dress outfits he has bought for his wife over the years.

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"Book Silhouettes", 1965, by Jim Dine; one of the many lithographs reproduced in Richard Vicary's *Advanced Lithography* (1973), 108 illustrations, 16 in colour, Thames and Hudson, 16; paperback £2.95. A companion to his earlier *Manual of Lithography*, this volume deals mainly with techniques developed since 1950.

nuzzled by a blonde in a sailor suit. Above the photo is printed "What does possession mean to you?" below it is printed "7% of our population own 84% of our wealth". That is all.

One might have thought that a lot of conceptualism was produced on the principle, if it is a principle, that there are no rules for what can be done only once, but Michael Compton, for one, doesn't mind repeating himself. Here again, for instance, is the glass of water on a shelf that he once claimed to be an oak tree. His last gallery show (at the Rowan) consisted of large baroque canvases whose top left-hand corners had a tiny painting copied from the oak tree. The source, at the Hayward he has done much the same thing, though the pictures are now originals (junk-shop purchases) and are inserted at a tilt in the centre of the large canvas. Stephen Buckley, too, appears as a conceptualist rather than as a painter. I stress this because in some quarters he is regarded as a hope for English painting. But he has no touch, is a bad colourist and relies too much on pattern. His conceptual tactic is to produce particular pictorial conventions (of the simplest sort, e.g. flat paintings on an canvas, are made out of paint and are attached to rectangular stretchers) and then to bully or parody these conventions.

A Buckley picture will be made out of, say, a dozen different canvases joined together at eccentric angles; the picture surface will be made out of plaited strips; the medium will be wax and oil. This does not amount to a personal painting style; it is rather a recipe for recognisability. Nor does it extend the possibilities for painting. Although I can imagine little future for minimal painting, the future for a more authentic pictorial experience in Bob Law's work than in Buckley's. Law exhibits square, triangular canvases with one continuing line finely drawn just inside their perimeter.

There is one room, and only one room, at the Hayward that is successful. It is Howard Hodgkin's, the only painter of his generation who has been exhibiting since the 1960s—whose work has not declined in recent years. It has not much developed, in the sense that his paintings do not look much different now from the way they did fifteen years ago: but they are richer, richer, more right, every time he shows.

Kitaj wishes to claim him as one of his figurative school. I find this beside the point, for the essence of his work is not figurative. It is a journal, blocky, representational drawing which is then painted over and over again. It may be significant that so much of his vocabulary is close to Delaunay, Léger (the Léger of 1919) and Matisse (the Matisse of "The Moroccan"). The nub of his work is what used to be called abstracted realism. Every time he paints, he is re-creating his experience. He is unique, and should not be in his present company.

In fact, he helped to choose it. "The selection was made on the basis of the selectors' view of the artist's work generally and not of individual works of art," Michael Compton writes in his introduction. That seems a very bad principle. Why don't we have a show of good English art that is selected from studios, not address books? There has never been such a thing. Next year the Hayward Annual will be chosen by five women. Why? What hopes can we have of it?

Give us Grace

If W. G. Grace were alive and batting today, would he have signed up with the morcanaries of Kerry Packer? The horrible truth is that he most likely would, given the usual size and equipment of his ego. On the other hand, if there were Graces still to be seen on county cricket grounds, there would be no hope at all for any Packer's game for a "circus". The worst of all would be a circus in himself. Who would not have paid the gate-money merely to hear him grinding his teeth at the fast bowlers on the other side?

Cricket is economically at risk because it has become prosaic. Just how prosaic can be seen at a glance from *Cricketers*, a slim but definitive archive of cricket's simplest characters and most melodramatic events. The audible grating of W. G. Grace's teeth as he faced the Australian bowler Spofforth is only one of many where facts are rumoured that Mr. Grace has turned up in his research. Some

Fifty years on...

In a leading article in the TLS of August 4, 1927, T. S. Eliot discussed the literary relationship between Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Collins he wrote, was "a Dickens without genius" and "The Moonstone" "near Black House". "In order to enjoy and appreciate the work of Wilkie Collins we ought to be able to reassemble the elements which have been dissociated in the modern novel." Before the detection story, created by Poe, "something as intellectual and intellectual as a chess problem" and the English detective novel, Collins was "less on the basis of the mathematical problem as much more on the intangible human element", comes melodrama.

It is to be hoped that some early and philosophic critic of the present generation may be able to write a book on the history of the detective story. The age of melodrama passed, like before any person living was aware of its existence, in the very end of the last century. But then many living who are not too busy to remember the melodramatic before the cinema replaced it, have sat entranced, in the stalls of local or provincial theatres, before some representation of *Le Maitre et la Femme*, *The White Slave*, *Le Maître et la Femme*, and what not too old to have observed curious interest the replacement dramatic melodrama by cinematic melodrama, and the evolution of the elements of the three-volume melodramatic into the various types of the modern 300-page 7s 6d novel. Those who have lived before such terms as "high-brow fiction", "low-brow fiction", "detective fiction" were known, realize that melodrama is a term which has been used to describe a vast range of literature, and that the publishers who use it, what the publishers mean is, "what we will sell with less and less pretence of excitement—what we call 'drama'." But in the golden age of the dramatic fiction there was no distinction. The best novels were thrilling; the distinction of genre between such-and-such a "psychological" novel (which is such-and-such a masterpiece of "detective" novel of today is greater than the distinction of genre between *Wuthering Heights*, or even *Le Maitre et la Femme*, and *Le Maitre et la Femme*, the last of which "achieved" a success with less and less pretence of excitement—and was translated into every language—and we were sure to find it in the world. English really isn't my language—my real thing is art, drawing, visuals, and that sort of thing. True. Inside the cinema, expensive souvenir programmes are sold, and the most common one is the *Golden Book of the Yellow Menace*—the sort of fear that the British millionaire Tom Buchanan voices in *The Great Gatsby*, when he warns of the imminent summer-geese on the Baltic races by those procent horde.

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Another part of the galaxy

By S. Schoenbaum

The current United States film season has already seen several expensive fiascos fail to detonate although they no doubt looked profitable on the drawing board: *Boorman's Exorcist II: The Heretic*, *Friedkin's Sorcerer*, *Scorsese's New York, New York*. These proven directors seemed to be taking few risks. As a sequel to the first *Exorcist*, *Heretic* had many of the same stars and a prepared audience; *Sorcerer*, a reread of *Clouzot's* brutally effective thriller, *Le Salaire de la peur* (the Arnaut's novel, promised more slavish excitement of the French Connection variety; *New York, New York*, with two hot star properties—*Liza Minnelli* and *Robert de Niro*—would re-create the glories of the studio musical, the potency of whose appeal recent *That's Entertainment* anthologies had amply demonstrated. In showbiz, however, as at the gaming tables, there are no sure things. Preview audiences reacted to *Exorcist II* with such hostile wrath that Boorman took flight from Ireland to perform emergency surgery; the prognosis remains negative. Film enthusiasts may quietly relish the apparent failure of the big-budget epics based on crassly calculated and creatively inhibiting formulae. Meanwhile we have *Star Wars* (Twentieth-Century Fox), written and directed by George Lucas, with a couple of unassuming veterans and the rest of the cast mostly nobodies. The movie has gone into orbit; not a mere blockbuster, but a super-blockbuster.

Various signs point to this transcendence. First, the ecstatic reviews conferring immediate classic status on the film (*The Washington Post* called it "the best of the year thus far" in its first review, *Time* gave it a box-office long queues wait in sun or rain. Peddlers hawk *Star Wars* T-shirts and buttons with the slogan from the film "May the Force be with you"—which is a prescience of its half-baked religiosity. An urchin hands out posters featuring a photograph of a lovable robot and announcing that a local daily will carry a serialized version of the original book based—by a familiar process of back formation—on the original screenplay. (A studio press release quotes Lucas, whose name appears on the title-page, as saying: "I have written the worst thing in the world. English really isn't my language—my real thing is art, drawing, visuals, and that sort of thing." True. Inside the cinema, expensive souvenir programmes are sold, and the most common one is the *Golden Book of the Yellow Menace*—the sort of fear that the British millionaire Tom Buchanan voices in *The Great Gatsby*, when he warns of the imminent summer-geese on the Baltic races by those procent horde.

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up with *Flash Gordon* via two volumes of reprints in the early years of the strip, with tersely informative introductory notes: *Flash Gordon: The Planet Mongo* and *Flash Gordon: Into the Water World of Mongo*, 1974, edited and published by Woolly Gelman (Nostalgia Press in partnership with King Features Syndicate). Its success was instantaneous and worldwide. Frenchmen followed *Cup L'Eclair*; Australians, *Speed Gordon*. In Italy the young Federico Fellini came under the spell. "At times in my films," he has remarked, "I seek to find the colour and verve of *Flash Gordon* and his world." Two years after its debut the strip made a transition to cinema in the Buster Crabbe serial, which proved the strip's popularity to the cinema. The last, in 1940, was called *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*. After that there was nowhere to go, and anyway a war was on.

Flash Gordon belongs to the golden age of the comic strip, Dashiell Hammett, already celebrated for his Continental Op and with *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key* to his credit, did not disdain to collaborate with Raymond and furnished the story line for another action strip, *Secret Agent X-9*. The Hammett connection illustrates the affinities of the comics with pulp fiction: *Flash Gordon* has been with *Amazing Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder*, and the like. Behind it also lurks Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs (the latter's series, *John Carter of Mars*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and *King Kong*).

The hero of this unlikely mix is a daffy blond Aryan with the correct academic and social credentials: Flash is a Yale graduate and well-renewed polo player. Along with his girlfriend Dale Arden, of indurcible devotion and chastity, he is forced to go along with the wild-eyed Dr Huns Zerkow on his rocket ship to the planet Mongo. This surly planet is on a collision course with the earth, and Flash is to a vanished future; actually, the idea of the future being embodied in a then unrealized technology. In *Flash Gordon*, conceived some time before actual space exploration, the technology that propels the rocket ship passengers experience no problems with weightlessness; they do not even bother to fasten seat-belts.

Impending catastrophe is averted when the vehicle crash-lands on Mongo, improbably diverging from its course. Flash and Dale are, however, taken prisoner by officers of Ming the Merciless, an unspeakable and patently Oriental despot. Raymond plays the scene too widely, over the latent anxieties about the Yellow Menace—the sort of fear that the British millionaire Tom Buchanan voices in *The Great Gatsby*, when he warns of the imminent summer-geese on the Baltic races by those procent horde.

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other sources—the giant red Drok was more or less a skyscraper. But Raymond had a flair for improbable anatomical combinations, and the deadpan realism of his dry-brush technique was totally persuasive. Along with millions of all ages yearning for escapist fantasy in the depths of the Great Depression, I was hooked.

All that took place before Lucas was born. He caught up with the Crabbe serial on the box, and afterwards found his way back to the strip. At one time he hoped to make a *Flash Gordon* film, but the unavailability of the rights dashed that hope. So he invented his own space fantasy. It has to do with interstellar wars in a distant galaxy. The Republic, repository of civil virtues, has succumbed to the Empire in the Clone Wars. Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith, now rules. (Names count for much in both film and strip, reviving the child's delight in untrammelled linguistic invention.) Only a small enclave of resistance holds out on the planet Alderaan. With stolen plans for the Death Star—the Empire's ultimate weapon—Princess Leia is captured (as the film begins) while en route to Tatooine to enlist Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness) in the struggle for liberty.

He is the last of the enlightened Jedi knights who guarded the Republic and understood the Force, the mysterious energy field that surrounds all living things and binds the galaxy together. Leia is brought on board the Death Star, but two loyal robots, the humanoid See-Threepio (C3PO) and the tripod Artoo-Detoo (R2D2), escape by life-boat to the planet Tatooine. There they meet first the young Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), a homesick teen in the wilderness, and then Kenobi. The latter, an archetypal saint, lives alone in his cave; for his heavenly garb, this hermit of the desert might have sat for a quattrocento painting of St Jerome. It is Kenobi's destiny to die sacrificially, his martyrdom being followed at once by a miracle. The quest-novel structure in the film is a technicality, the present idea of the future being embodied in a then unrealized technology. In *Flash Gordon*, conceived some time before actual space exploration, the technology that propels the rocket ship passengers experience no problems with weightlessness; they do not even bother to fasten seat-belts.

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stands seven feet tall in his yak-fur costume and is co-pilot of the pirate ship. He and See-Threepio, the courtly robot, would feel at home in Oz.

Verbal wit is no more to be sought in the script than in its comic-strip antecedents, but parody and allusion provide, if not wit, then some camp cinematic humour. The Grand Moff Tarkin (Peter Cushing), governor of the outlying imperial territories, is the suave, cruel Nazi commandant of Second World War melodramas. We expect diminutive Carrie Fisher, in her white robes and severe hairdo (based on the side, rather disconcertingly like Margaret Dumont in the old Marx Brothers comedies), to conduct herself like the demure heroine of the ernst Hollywood chivalric romances; but she comes out tough and brassy. Her various dreadful ordeals never impair her make-up or coiffure. When on the Death Star the intrepid trio—Leia, Skywalker, and Solo—find themselves trapped in a pit, the slina and water monsters at the bottom derive from *Flash Gordon*, but the converging walls are out of creepy-house horror film of the 1930s. The duel between Vader and Kenobi is standard swash-buckler stuff, with Vader in the Basil Rathbone role, and light sabres replacing the customer's foils. But best of all, and by itself worth the price of admission, is the sequence at the cantina in which Solo is recruited. The model here is the tough western saloon where the hard-pressed home-steaders hire a professional gun.

In *Star Wars* a jazz band of unlikely creatures provides background music, 1930s nightclub style, but the atmosphere is unfriendly—the bartender refuses to serve robots, brawls break out at the bar: creatures with one eye or many eyes, some with flesh and some furred. Tentacles, claws, and hands grasp drinking vessels of various sizes and shapes. There is "a large squarish monstrosity" and "a cross between a capybara and a small baboon"—I quote from the novel. The sheer exuberance of outlandish invention in this episode exhilarates.

Allusion doesn't always work so successfully. In the finale the victorious heroes march through the masses through an immense hall to be decorated by the princess. Multitudes cheer; the orchestration is Wagnerian. The inspiration surely derives from Loni Riefenstahl's *Der Triumph des Willens*, when the victorious soldiers march in reference to Nazi propaganda serve in *Star Wars*? The evil characters, not the Republican survivors, have fascist associations: the Imperial guards are called stormtroopers. The reference brings no thematic enrichment.

Never mind. *Star Wars* is superior entertainment that deserves its box-office success, and moreover a film to which parents can take their children without squinting through it themselves. Still, despite the popular hysteria and not unrelated public relations hoopla, we do well to resist going overboard. The film has nothing like the intelligence and resonance of Stanley Kubrick's 2001; but then, Kubrick had Arthur C. Clarke as his collaborator. Nor does *Star Wars* hold the narrative interest of *Forbidden Planet* (1956), which is—inspired notion!—a spin-off from *The Tempest*, with Prospero translated into the scientist Morbius, Ariel into a robot, and the deformed slave, Caliban, into a primordial monster of Morbius's id. What surprises is that Hollywood has been so slow to pick up the huge popular craving for (to apply Tennyson's words) "the fairy tales of science". That such a craving exists seems certain. On television *Star Trek* developed a cult following, the *Trekies* who have remained loyal long after the series was exiled to the rerun circuit (new episodes are on the way). In Washington, the Air and Space Museum, barely a year old, attracts more visitors than the White House, the Lincoln Memorial, or the National Gallery of Art. No doubt the moguls will now awaken to join the bandwagon in the sky, and before long fleets of spaceships will be streaming through galaxies as yet uninvented.

Beckett/Beckett

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